

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

This Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) guides the implementation of the U.S. Army Fort Belvoir's natural resources program for the years 2001 through 2005. The plan establishes procedures to ensure the sustainability of the land to accomplish Fort Belvoir's military mission. It outlines conservation efforts for Fort Belvoir's natural resources (e.g., aquatic resources, flora, fauna) and establishes procedures to ensure compliance with related environmental laws and regulations.

SCOPE OF THE INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Implementation of this plan applies to organizations both internal and external to Fort Belvoir that influence, or have the potential to influence Fort Belvoir's natural resources. This application includes active duty units, U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard components, tenant and satellite organizations, directorates, private groups, and individuals.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE MILITARY MISSION

Fort Belvoir's mission is to operate and maintain the installation; provide quality installation support and services to its customers; and to plan, maintain, and execute mobilization readiness, military operations, and contingency missions. Since the departure of the Engineer School in 1988, the emphasis of Fort Belvoir's mission has shifted from training to providing logistical and administrative support to its tenants. Fort Belvoir is home to approximately 100 tenant and satellite organizations, and more than 2,000 family housing units. The installation's 9,094 acres support a working population of approximately 17,000, including 4,500 military personnel.

Fort Belvoir's mission includes the following eight elements:

- Contingency Military Support
- Regional Administration Center
- Regional Logistics Support Center
- Regional Recreation Center
- Regional Classroom Center
- Regional Housing

- Regional Military Community Support
- Regional Environmental Stewardship

Although much of Fort Belvoir's land area remains undeveloped, the installation's mission requires significant administrative space and infrastructure. Fort Belvoir has become the receiving installation of many organizations realigned by the Base Realignment and Closure Acts. New roads and buildings have been constructed on Fort Belvoir, and existing roads have been improved to accommodate increased numbers of personnel. New community support facilities have been built to provide services to military personnel and their dependents in the national capital region. Development is expected to continue as Fort Belvoir becomes host to additional tenants, as well as additional housing and community support facilities. Belvoir's natural resources provide high-quality settings for housing and administration facilities. They also contribute to the installation's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs, which are aimed at improving the quality of life for military and civilian personnel who work and reside on post.

Military training activities on Fort Belvoir are not land intensive. They primarily consist of land navigation, rescue, defensive tactics, mission essential task list skills, road march, float bridge, fixed-wing aircraft, and helicopter transport and touch and go training.

This INRMP addresses the impacts of the military mission (i.e., the eight mission elements) on natural resources and proposes means to mitigate these impacts. It also addresses natural resources required to sustain the various elements of Fort Belvoir's military mission.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

Several regulations mandate the preparation and implementation of this INRMP. They are the Sikes Act (16 U.S.C. 670a et seq.) as amended in the Sikes Act Improvement Act of 1997; Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 4715.3, *Environmental Conservation Program*; and Army Regulation (AR) 200-3, *Natural Resources – Land, Forest, and Wildlife Management*. DoD Instruction 4715.3 requires that INRMPs be maintained and implemented for lands that have suitable habitat for conserving and managing natural ecosystems. The plans are to be developed with active involvement of installation and higher command personnel, and are to involve coordination with relevant outside authorities, partners, and users. Natural resources management is to be integrated and should follow the principles and practices of ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation.

This INRMP should be reviewed annually so it can be updated for mission or environmental changes, and it should be revised and approved by the command level at least every 5 years. This INRMP describes how Fort Belvoir will implement provisions of the Sikes Act, DoD Instruction 4715.3, AR 200-3, and installation regulations and policies. Installation regulations and policies include the Fort Belvoir Supplement to AR 200-3; Fort Belvoir Regulation 210-70, *Range Procedures and Utilization of Training Areas*; Fort Belvoir's *Tree Removal and Protection Policy*, 420-22-00; and, Fort Belvoir *Integrated Pest Management Policy*, 200-04-00. This INRMP helps ensure that Fort Belvoir complies with federal, state, regional, and local statutes, regulations and initiatives, most notably those associated with wetlands (e.g., Clean Water Act, Executive Order 11990, North American Wetlands Conservation, etc.), endangered species (e.g.,

Endangered Species Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act), water quality (e.g., Clean Water Act, Phase I and Phase II Stormwater Regulations, Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act, Coastal Zone Management Act), and fish and wildlife management (e.g., Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Lacey Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, etc.).

The Sikes Act requires Fort Belvoir to coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) to obtain their signatory approval of this plan. Coordination with USFWS is part of the formal consultation process under the Endangered Species Act.

ECOSYSTEM STATUS

Fort Belvoir is located on the western shore of the Potomac River, approximately 75 miles upstream of the Chesapeake Bay. The installation has more than 12 miles of shoreline, three significant wetland areas (two of which are designated wildlife refuges), and extensive interior contiguous forested areas. Approximately 70% of Fort Belvoir is undeveloped. The installation supports 17 plant community types, four of which possess state conservation rankings of “very rare,” or rarer. A large number of fish and wildlife species have been recorded, or are considered likely to occur on Fort Belvoir including 43 species of mammals, 263 species of birds, 32 species of reptiles, 27 species of amphibians, and 60 species of fish. These numbers include three state and/or federal listed species: the bald eagle (federal-listed threatened and state-listed endangered), the peregrine falcon (state-listed endangered), and the wood turtle (state-listed threatened). The installation also supports 89 state rare plant and animal species and 63 Partners in Flight (PIF) priority bird species.

Fort Belvoir’s surrounding local area (metropolitan Washington D.C. area) and regional area (Chesapeake Bay region) are both experiencing rapid conversions of undeveloped natural areas to developed land uses. Within the metropolitan Washington D.C. area, Fort Belvoir represents a significant tract of native vegetation in terms of size, diversity, and position relative to the location of off-post tracts of native vegetation. Fort Belvoir has recognized the ecological importance of on-post natural habitats by conserving two installation wildlife refuges (Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge and Jackson Miles Abbott Wetland Refuge) totaling approximately 1,500 acres and designating a Forest and Wildlife Corridor covering approximately 740 acres. These large areas of native vegetation are aligned on Fort Belvoir’s Main Post from the northeast to the southwest. This linear configuration affords a contiguous band of wildlife habitat through the installation, and provides for connection with wildlife habitat areas outside the installation (e.g., Huntley Meadows County Park, Pohick Bay Regional Park, etc.).

Fort Belvoir has completed its primary baseline natural resources surveys. These baseline surveys provide the foundation of the natural resources program. Consistent with the principles of ecosystem management, Fort Belvoir aims to preserve the native diversity of communities and of species within communities. The installation does not emphasize single-species management, nor does it aim to increase the number of species or communities on post. Fort Belvoir fully embraces biodiversity conservation, and has developed and implemented an ecosystem-based natural resources management program.

PARTNERSHIPS

This INRMP cannot be implemented by Fort Belvoir base operations (BASEOPS) staff alone. In accordance with the ecosystem management philosophy, Fort Belvoir has forged partnerships with federal, state, and local government agencies, and private organizations, to manage its natural resources. Partnering agencies include the USFWS, the VDGIF, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Northern Virginia Regional Parks Authority, and the Fairfax County Department of Planning. In addition, Fort Belvoir is an active participant in the Chesapeake Bay Program, which is a DoD and DA-supported program. Fort Belvoir also participates in other international, national, and regional initiatives including the PIF Program and Fairfax County's oral rabies vaccination program. Over the next 5 years, Fort Belvoir will participate in other regional management initiatives as needed and appropriate.

PLAN COMPONENTS

This INRMP describes Fort Belvoir's environmental setting; the installation history; Fort Belvoir's military mission, its impacts on natural resources, and natural resources needed to support the mission; installation land use and facilities; and parties responsible and/or interested in implementing this INRMP.

This INRMP conveys Fort Belvoir's vision and mission statements for the natural resources program, as well as overall program goals. Fort Belvoir's natural resources management program is fully integrated among all natural resources disciplines. Consequently, implementation of management actions is not necessarily discipline-specific. However, to facilitate the presentation of its natural resources management program in this INRMP, Fort Belvoir's natural resources management program is defined and described in terms of seven major natural resources discipline areas, as follows:

- Water Resources, (e.g., watersheds, aquatic systems, and fish)
- Wetlands
- Undeveloped Areas Vegetation, (e.g., native vegetation communities and forests)
- Developed Areas Vegetation, (e.g., landscaping, urban tree management, grounds maintenance, and pest management)
- Wildlife
- Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Species and Communities
- Special Natural Areas (e.g., refuges, and the Forest and Wildlife Corridor).

These natural resources disciplines areas are presented in seven individual sections of this INRMP. For each of these seven discipline areas, the INRMP describes baseline conditions and presents related management policies, objectives, and actions (e.g., management actions to date, continuing and future management).

This INRMP also includes sections addressing implementation and integration with other related plans (e.g., Long-Range Component of the Master Plan, Design Guidelines, Integrated Pest Management Plan, Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, etc.). The implementation section addresses the resource requirements (e.g., staffing and funding), organizational requirements, and contract requirements needed to implement this plan, and thus fulfill the requirements of the Sikes Act, DoD Instruction 4715.3, and AR 200-3. The implementation section describes program management functions necessary to execute projects in each technical area, and provides a summary of projects by fiscal year. The implementation section also discusses necessary funding to implement the INRMP. The integration section identifies other installation plans and programs (e.g., Master Planning, Pollution Prevention, Cultural Resources Management and Stormwater Pollution Prevention, etc.) that could relate to natural resources and the implementation of this INRMP.

This INRMP has been documented using National Environmental Policy Act procedures and policies. The Fort Belvoir INRMP Environmental Assessment documents the evaluation of various approaches to manage Fort Belvoir's natural resources through the implementation of an INRMP.

FORT BELVOIR'S NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Fort Belvoir's natural resources management philosophy focuses on biodiversity conservation. Installation personnel have developed and implemented an ecosystem-based natural resources management program following this philosophy. Fort Belvoir's vision for the natural resources management program is to manage natural resources using sound ecological principles in an appropriate landscape context (e.g., local, regional, and national), to support the military mission, and to continue to provide opportunities for future generations to access and use the installation's natural resources, consistent with resource conservation.

The mission of the natural resources management program is to manage natural resources as an integral part of Fort Belvoir's military mission. As the guardian of army lands, it is the mission of the natural resources program to maintain the existing level of biodiversity using sound ecological principles to ensure that economic and aesthetic values of public lands are maintained. The program's mission involves ensuring installation compliance with natural resources laws and regulations, as well as providing public access and customer service support to base operations, tenants, military personnel and their families; the research and education community; and the general public.

The objectives and actions in this INRMP are written in accordance with Fort Belvoir's natural resources management philosophy, vision, and mission. Many of the management actions are continuations of existing actions. Management will continue to prioritize conserving and enhancing native resources, while providing balance among the multiple legitimate uses and users of these resources. Continued support of military training and testing will take primacy. After that, management emphasis will be on conservation and enhancement of resources in accordance with established DoD and DA natural resources management policies, and DoD and DA commitments to natural resource stewardship programs, such as the Chesapeake Bay Program and the PIF Program. All of the installation's natural resources management actions

will be in accordance with applicable federal, state, local, DoD, DA, and Fort Belvoir policy. Planned management for each component resource is discussed in the following subsections.

Water Resources

Fort Belvoir recognizes that the most significant threats to local water resources today arise from stormwater-related problems, as well as misuse and overuse. Consequently, Fort Belvoir's conservation program will continue to emphasize actions to correct and prevent stormwater-related problems, to restore damaged stream corridors, and to foster wise use of water resources. Fort Belvoir's natural resources management program will continue to promote public access to and appropriate use of water resources, and will continue to provide the public opportunities for recreational use of water resources and for environmental education and scientific research and study of water resources, consistent with resource conservation objectives. The natural resources program will continue to pursue innovative approaches to water resources management, and will increase efforts toward and involvement with regional water resources management actions.

Wetlands

Wetlands management on Fort Belvoir will continue to emphasize no net loss of wetlands and conservation and enhancement of native biodiversity. Fort Belvoir will continue to use conservation land-use designations to protect wetland areas from avoidable impact by construction or other land disturbing activities, as well as from impact by land development and land use activities in adjacent areas. The installation will continue to implement damage-control management actions, such as invasive/exotic species management, stormwater management, and problem wildlife management, to protect wetland resources from those threats. Fort Belvoir will continue to consider the potential for impacts to wetlands when making land-use and operational decisions, and will continue to mitigate all unavoidable wetland losses/impacts consistent with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency policies on wetland mitigation. Fort Belvoir will continue to provide the public opportunities for recreational use of wetlands and for environmental education and scientific research and study, consistent with resource conservation objectives. Where practicable and consistent with the installation mission, Fort Belvoir will continue to undertake actions to restore and enhance native wetland conditions.

Undeveloped Areas Vegetation

Fort Belvoir's vegetation management program will continue to emphasize sustaining and enhancing forest and grassland resources and controlling invasive/exotic vegetation. The installation will continue to manage threats to the installation's native vegetation by conserving its three special natural areas (i.e., the two refuges and the Forest and Wildlife Corridor), protecting vegetation in wetlands and steep sloped areas, correcting stormwater-related problems, and controlling overabundant wildlife and invasive vegetation. The post also intends to continue to perform vegetation restoration and enhancement in disturbed areas. Fort Belvoir will continue to provide the public opportunities for recreational use of undeveloped areas vegetation and for environmental education and scientific research and study, consistent with resource conservation objectives.

Developed Areas Vegetation

Fort Belvoir's developed areas management will continue to focus on sustaining and enhancing the installation's urban forest resources and providing grounds maintenance services. Management actions will continue to emphasize minimizing tree loss and mitigating unavoidable losses, reducing mowing throughout the installation, performing pest management in accordance with the installation Integrated Pest Management Plan, and performing invasive/exotic vegetation management.

Wildlife

Fort Belvoir's overall wildlife management strategy is to conserve and enhance healthy native wildlife communities, rather than emphasizing single-species or game-species management or production. Fort Belvoir's management program recognizes the importance of understanding native habitats, and managing or responding to the forces that influence those habitats. Fort Belvoir's management program will continue to focus on (1) conserving natural habitats in the size and configuration that best supports native wildlife populations; (2) eliminating, minimizing, or offsetting habitat disruptions such as forest fragmentation and damage by overabundant species; (3) enhancing habitat conditions for species and suites of species having recognized conservation priority, such as threatened, endangered, and PIF priority bird species; and (4) using indicator species to evaluate and set priorities for manipulation of habitat conditions. Fort Belvoir's natural resources management program will continue to promote public access to and appropriate use of wildlife resources, and will continue to provide the public opportunities for recreational use of wildlife resources, and for environmental education and for scientific research and study of wildlife resources, consistent with resource conservation objectives. Fort Belvoir will continue management actions to reduce the risk of problem wildlife disrupting mission. Fort Belvoir will continue to use hunting as a wildlife management tool. Fort Belvoir will continue, and expand upon, existing efforts and involvement with regional wildlife management actions.

Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Species

Fort Belvoir intends to continue the management emphasis on conservation of endangered, threatened, and rare species (and their habitats), and rare ecological communities. The foundation of Fort Belvoir's endangered, threatened, and rare species management is habitat conservation, consistent with the conservation recommendations of DCR's Natural Heritage Program (McCoy and Fleming, 2000; Hobson, 1996; 1997). Much of the installation's bald eagle habitat, as well as most of the installation's rare wetland community types, and their associated rare plant and animal species, are contained within the Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge. Similarly, some of the installation's wood turtle habitat is included within both refuges and within the Fort Belvoir Forest and Wildlife Corridor. The Fort Belvoir Master Plan designates the installation refuges, corridor, wetlands and steep-sloped areas as "environmentally constrained areas." Such conservation land-use designations protect the habitat in these areas from loss to development or land disturbing training activities.

Fort Belvoir will continue to use conservation land-use designations to protect important habitat areas for these resources, and will continue to implement management actions, such as invasive/exotic species management, stormwater management and problem wildlife management, to control threats to these resources. Fort Belvoir will continue to consider the potential for impacts to these resources when making land-use and operational decisions,

especially with regard to bald eagles and wood turtles. Where practicable and consistent with the installation mission, Fort Belvoir will continue to undertake actions to enhance habitat conditions for endangered, threatened, and rare species.

Special Natural Areas

Fort Belvoir will continue to maintain and manage the installation refuges and the Forest and Wildlife Corridor with a primary management emphasis on resource conservation. Fort Belvoir will continue to allow for and promote public access for compatible uses such as environmental education, scientific research and study, and low-intensity outdoor recreation, where such access and use is consistent with resource conservation. Fort Belvoir will continue to allow hunting and fishing, consistent with resource conservation objectives. Fort Belvoir will also continue to allow for non-disruptive military activities in these areas, when such activities cannot be supported in the designated training areas, consistent with resource conservation objectives. Management of the refuges and corridor will continue to follow the principles of ecosystem management, and will emphasize conservation of resources that have been assigned a high conservation priority through federal or state statute or regulation, DoD or DA policy, DoD-partnered programs (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Program, PIF program), through the State Natural Heritage Program, or through recognized importance to regional ecosystem function (e.g. wildlife migratory routes).

Since all of the high priority resources on Fort Belvoir are not completely contained within the boundaries of the installation refuges or corridor, Fort Belvoir recognizes the need for additional management actions to protect these resource areas. Fort Belvoir will investigate such actions to protect those resources. Appropriate management actions may be to expand the refuge and/or corridor boundaries to encompass specific resource areas, or to establish buffer areas in association with the refuges and/or the corridor. Another management action may be to define area-specific land-use designations that would be consistent with conservation of these resource areas and incorporate such designations into the Master Plan. Fort Belvoir recognizes that development of a management strategy that would both serve mission needs and provide for appropriate conservation of these resource areas will be a complex action. It appears that the first step should be to re-consider the present boundaries of the refuges and corridor to ensure that the designated areas encompass the most critical of the resource areas.

BENEFITS

Environmental Benefits

The INRMP provides the basis for the conservation and protection of natural resources. It will facilitate conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat by preventing or reducing avoidable losses of native vegetation resulting from development or the invasion of exotic species, and improve water quality and in-stream habitat by controlling stormwater-related sedimentation and erosion. The plan will also conserve and protect natural resources by providing measures to prevent overuse by humans and damage by wildlife.

Military Mission Benefits

Implementing this plan will support the eight elements of Fort Belvoir's military mission. Fort Belvoir's natural resources provide a high quality setting for those who work, live, and train on post. Fort Belvoir's natural resources and the natural resources program help provide a realistic training environment, which is crucial to ensure military readiness. Implementing this plan also contributes to the installation's commitment to the Army's Quality of Life and Communities of Excellence programs.

Quality of Life

This plan provides the means to manage natural resources for the benefit of the Fort Belvoir community. It will enhance the natural setting of the post and provide educational and recreational opportunities for members of this community. Areas particularly conducive to recreation include extensive shoreline along navigable waterways, mature forest areas, and grasslands.

Compliance Benefits

This plan is written in accordance with federal, state, DoD, DA, and Fort Belvoir policy. Implementation of the plan will aid Fort Belvoir in maintaining compliance with regulations related to natural resources conservation. Implementation of this plan will decrease long-term environmental costs and will reduce personal and installation liabilities from non-compliance with environmental laws and regulations. The plan also considers DoD and DA's commitments to natural resources stewardship programs such as the Chesapeake Bay Program and Partners in Flight Program.

Other Benefits

Implementation of this plan will increase environmental awareness, and awareness of DoD's role in environmental stewardship among the day workers, residents, neighbors, and the general public. Both community relations and Fort Belvoir's environmental image will be enhanced.

RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

The primary source of funding for the natural resources program is the Operations and Maintenance, Army (OMA) environmental fund account. This fund source is used for such actions as wildlife studies, plan preparation, wildlife habitat enhancement projects, wetland permit applications, Endangered Species Act consultations, environmental education program, and watershed restoration projects. The OMA non-environmental fund account provides funding for O&M actions including routine grounds maintenance, tree planting, landscaping, pest control, stormwater management, and facilities maintenance. Alternative sources of funding, such as the DoD Legacy Resources Management Program, the Chesapeake Bay Habitat Restoration Challenge Grant, and the National Environmental Education Training Foundation, provide limited funds for specific natural resources conservation projects through a competitive application process.

Staffing and Organization

This INRMP calls for the staff and organization of the natural resources program to continue as it was for the years 1996 through 2001, with a proposed increase in on-site contractor support. The INRMP calls for the continuation of four government staff positions in the Natural Resources Branch of the Environmental and Natural Resources Division. These government positions will be comprised of Natural Resources Specialists that will provide the core of professionally trained natural resources managers.

Section 107 of the Sikes Act Improvement Act states that the “Secretary of each military department shall ensure that sufficient numbers of professionally trained natural resources management personnel and natural resources law enforcement personnel are available and assigned responsibility to perform tasks necessary to carry out this title, including the preparation and implementation of integrated natural resources management plans.” Both the legislative history of the Sikes Act and AR 200-3 indicate that the management and conservation of natural resources under Army stewardship is an inherently governmental function. Section 670a(d) of the Sikes Act states “neither Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 nor any successor circular thereto applies to the procurement of services that are necessary of...implementation and enforcement of [the INRMP].” Therefore, the provisions of AR 5-20 (*Commercial Activities Program*) do not apply to the planning, implementation, enforcement, or management of Army natural resources management programs.

Contractor personnel will continue to be required to provide technical support to the natural resources program. This support includes conducting research and studies, performing wildlife field surveys, developing and coordinating an environmental education program, completing habitat enhancement projects, developing GIS data layers, developing plans and reports, controlling and managing problem wildlife, performing grounds maintenance, landscaping, pest control, providing impact assessments and recommending mitigation measures, developing engineering concepts and designs, etc. The INRMP calls for continuing the seven on-site contractors supporting Natural Resources Branch staff (in wildlife, forestry, grounds maintenance, pest management, forestry, volunteer coordination, environmental education and outreach, and refuge use), and adding three additional on-site contractors to support environmental education and outreach, stormwater management, and sediment and erosion control.

Contracting and Partnering

To accommodate changing program needs, and to provide maximum flexibility, the Natural Resources Branch will need to continue to hold an indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract for natural resources support. As stated above, contractor personnel will continue to be required to support the Natural Resources Branch staff in the various discipline areas including wildlife, forestry, grounds maintenance, pest management, stormwater management, refuge management, and education and outreach. As such, the Natural Resources Branch will need to continue to function as the contracting officer’s representative (COR) on these contracts. This will enable them to monitor the scope of work and the budgets. In addition, partnerships that have been formed with various federal, state, and local agencies will also continue. Therefore, the Natural Resources Branch will need to execute and control the funding and actions performed under memoranda of understanding and cooperative agreements.

Enforcement

Through its Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperative Law Enforcement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Garrison Fort Belvoir, dated 20 February 1996, Fort Belvoir has one Special Agent within ENRD. The intent of this agreement is to provide the Special Agent with the authority to enforce all laws administered by the U.S. and the installation relating to fish, wildlife, and other natural resources. Natural resources regulations must continue to be enforced from within the Environmental and Natural Resources Division to maintain an effective natural resources management program as outlined in this INRMP and as required under the Sikes Act.

CONCLUSION

This INRMP presents a package that will (1) comply with all applicable natural resources statutes, regulations, policies, and directives; (2) conserve and enhance Fort Belvoir's natural resources; (3) support the military mission; (4) provide for balanced public access to and use of installation natural resources, consistent with conservation objectives; and (5) promote and enhance the installation's relationship with the public. This plan will not resolve all existing and/or future environmental issues or conflicts. It does, however, attempt to minimize these issues and conflicts by providing a basis for natural resources-related decision-making.